

Canine Companions calls for support of assistance dog handlers facing daily exclusion, discrimination and anxiety

New report reveals widespread difficulties using public spaces including transport, restaurants and medical facilities

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Assistance dog handlers deserve greater understanding and stronger legal protection, according to national nonprofit [Canine Companions](#). The call comes in the wake of an alarming survey exposing exclusion, discrimination and anxiety faced by assistance dog teams on a daily basis.

Canine Companions reports significant difficulties for clients and their assistance dogs using public spaces including transport, restaurants and medical facilities, despite laws supposed to protect their right of access and service.



Assistance dog handler responses suggest the worst places for access include restaurants and cafes (56%); hotels and other accommodation (28%); medical facilities (28%); and grocery stores (19%).

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*Canine Companions CEO
Paige Mazzoni*

The recent [Paws For Access Report on Assistance Dog Rights](#), published jointly by Assistance Dogs International (ADI) and the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF), contains survey responses from more than 1,200 assistance dog handlers in 24 countries around the world. Among the most concerning findings are the emotional and behavioral toll on assistance dog handlers. Four out of every ten said they sometimes stay at home or avoid public places because of the hostility they encounter when out and about.

“We see an urgent need for improved public education, clearer definitions of assistance dog roles, and stronger enforcement of existing laws,” says Canine Companions CEO Paige Mazzoni, “This would help mitigate the challenges faced by handlers and promote a more inclusive and accessible environment for all assistance dog handlers.”

The Paws For Access Report on Assistance Dog Rights looks in detail at the main challenges experienced by assistance dog handlers including access to public spaces and public transport; demands to verify or justify their dogs; fake assistance dogs; emotional and behavioral impact; and infringement of human rights.

The USA, UK, Canada and Australia rank among the most unfriendly countries for handlers with assistance dogs, despite having some of the most robust disability and discrimination laws.

“The repercussions of a handler being denied entry with their assistance dog extend way beyond immediate practical inconveniences,” says Mazzoni. “The emotional and subsequent behavioral impact of these experiences can last a long time. On top of living with a physical or psychological disability, many handlers feel unwelcome, frustrated and anxious.”

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Perhaps most worryingly — given that many assistance dog handlers are frequent users of hospitals and clinics — 28% of respondents report discrimination while accessing medical facilities. Many note that poorly trained, uncontrollable and disruptive ‘therapy dogs’ present in some medical facilities tend to interfere with ADI or IGDF certified assistance dogs.

Public transport also received strong criticism, with 56% of respondents globally experiencing refusals in taxis or rideshare vehicles. Guide dog handlers report even higher refusal rates (63%).



ADI Executive Director Chris Diefenthaler shares, “There is an urgent need for greater societal awareness, enhanced legislation and public education to ensure assistance dog handlers are welcome in public places globally.”

Assistance dog handlers also highlight the rise in untrained, out-of-control and poorly behaved fake service dogs, leading to skepticism or even hostility towards genuine assistance dog handlers. 50% of respondents report demands to verify their dog as a bona fide assistance dog. Despite the ADI Digital ID being used by more than 11,000 assistance dog teams worldwide, many businesses seem unable to differentiate between a genuine assistance dog and a fake.

The report recommends a five-point action plan to help change public attitudes and behavior:

1. Public education through awareness campaigns that clarify the roles of assistance dogs and dispel common misconceptions.
2. Standardization and regulation to develop a consistent global definition of assistance dogs and their roles.
3. Improved identification through vests and digital ID cards could help reduce skepticism.
4. Small business training to educate businesses about legal rights and responsibilities regarding assistance dogs and provide training to staff to reduce access refusals.
5. Legislative reforms to protect the rights of assistance dogs teams.

To read the report and learn more visit canine.org/science.

About Canine Companions

National nonprofit Canine Companions is celebrating 50 years of empowering people with disabilities to live with greater independence — and it all started with a service dog named Abdul. Canine Companions invented the concept of the modern service dog in 1975 and has since placed more than 8,300 expertly trained dogs at no cost to clients, entirely supported by donations. Today, as America’s first and largest provider of service dogs, Canine Companions leverages seven locations across the country to serve adults, children and veterans with disabilities as well as professionals working in health care, law enforcement and educational settings in all 50 states. Donate and learn more at canine.org.

About Assistance Dogs International (ADI)

ADI is the world’s leading standards-setter and accreditation body for training assistance dogs. As a worldwide coalition of nearly 200 non-profit member organizations spread across five continents, ADI is the world’s most diverse and inclusive assistance dog certification and standard-setting body. For more information visit <https://assistedoginternational.org>

About the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF)

IGDF is the charity that defines and maintains international standards for the training of guide dogs around the world. This work ensures the quality and safety of guide dog services for people who are blind or have low vision. IGDF was established in 1989 and now has 100 member

organizations from 34 different countries. As well as developing international standards, IGDF supports new guide dog organizations around the world, helping them to grow and progress towards full accreditation against the IGDF standards. For more information visit <https://www.igdf.org.uk/>

Tami Kelly
Rocket Science
+1 925-640-9997
[email us here](#)

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